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- [Road construction](#)
- [Sheriff sales](#)
- [American Profile](#)
- [Parade.com](#)
- [Relish Magazine](#)

>> ARCHIVES

July 2009

| M | T | W | T | F | S | S |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | |
| « Jun | | | Aug » | | | |

- [September 2009](#)
- [August 2009](#)
- [July 2009](#)
- [June 2009](#)
- [May 2009](#)
- [April 2009](#)
- [March 2009](#)
- [February 2009](#)
- [January 2009](#)
- [December 2008](#)
- [November 2008](#)
- [October 2008](#)
- [September 2008](#)
- [August 2008](#)
- [July 2008](#)
- [June 2008](#)
- [May 2008](#)
- [April 2008](#)
- [March 2008](#)
- [February 2008](#)
- [January 2008](#)
- [December 2007](#)
- [November 2007](#)
- [October 2007](#)
- [September 2007](#)
- [August 2007](#)
- [July 2007](#)
- [June 2007](#)
- [May 2007](#)
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[A YEAR LATER: Site owner says work will begin later this month](#)

Lisa Roberson

ELYRIA — Getting John Peshek to open up about his plans for the former General Industries site is not easy.

In the year since a massive fire ripped through the buildings that filled three city blocks, Peshek has stayed mostly under the radar.

And even when he does decide to talk, he chooses his words carefully — as he did during a recent interview.

In that interview, much as he did on July 11, 2008 — when he first talked about the fire that devastated his property eight days earlier — Peshek maintained that he will get the property cleaned up.

"We're close to starting some work," he said in a telephone interview Tuesday. "We're moving right along."

And while those living near the rubble are taking a wait-and-see attitude, Jim Augustyn, spokesman for the federal Environmental Protection Agency, said Tuesday that Peshek has been given permission to do limited work at the site — and soon.

"Mr. Peshek has permission to hire an asbestos abatement company to do some limited asbestos removal," he said. "By mid-July, they will be able to begin work on the limited known asbestos on the site."

What's the delay?

Work of any kind at the site would be a stark contrast to the past year of inactivity.

With the announcement from the Ohio EPA in July 2008 that the site was contaminated with asbestos, Peshek's plan for rebuilding was pushed onto the desks of state and federal officials — and they have control over the rules.

"There is a lot of regulatory play that takes place with a project of this magnitude," Augustyn said. "No one can just go in there, load bricks and debris onto a truck and drive off. I know that's what a lot of people want to see happen, but with asbestos you can't do that."

Augustyn said the federal EPA, which is taking over remediation of the site, was not the original overseeing agency. The Ohio EPA was the point agency for the project and originally told Peshek what needed to be done at the site.

"Mr. Peshek had his plans and ideas about what he wanted to happen on the site, and the EPA had to go through their own guidelines for letting him develop these plans," Augustyn said. "But it became obvious that the remediation was not going anywhere."

In addition, the limited authority of the state EPA worked against the cleanup process, Augustyn said.

"(The state EPA) could submit notices of violation, but as long as the site remained fenced and there were no visible emissions — dust clouds coming off the site — basically the only thing they could do was wait for a violation to direct the owner to do the cleanup."

Getting the federal EPA involved came in September. And the federal involvement will increase the pressure to get the site cleaned up, Augustyn said.

"We intend to give (Peshek) a very short window to comply," he said. "He has known for weeks that an order to force cleanup is coming."

The cleanup order will give Peshek 10 days to come up with a work plan and a schedule that includes a detailed sampling plan to show how much and where the asbestos is on the site as well as a health and safety plan.

Augustyn estimates Peshek should have the order in hand by mid- to late-July.

Peshek's plan

Although it's been a year since the fire, Peshek said he doesn't need a cleanup order to compel him to do the work.

"My business has not operated since the day of the fire," he said. "It's just too expensive to move the presses that are there and frankly, if I'm going to rebuild, it's going to be there."

The former factory is at the corner of Olive and Taylor streets. It once was a complex of roughly 10 buildings that spanned three city blocks.

Peshek used about 25 percent of the space to operate his custom plastics and fiberglass manufacturing plant.

Part of the cleanup problem has been financial. Peshek had no insurance on the property.

"I just have to find a way to remove the bricks economically," he said. "The biggest problem is the bricks because they are porous."

Peshek said he's going to start the process with a smaller task — removing a 4-inch-wide, 50-foot-long pipe that is wrapped in asbestos. It has to be removed from the site because asbestos can be seen on the pipe, Augustyn said.

"But it's not airborne. It's encapsulated around the pipe," Peshek added.

From there, Peshek said he will clear out about 50 barrels that are scattered around the site. The drums contain a hardened plastic or resin-type material, but it is unknown what is inside without testing.

Peshek said they were there prior to his purchase of the building, but they are his responsibility since he owns the property.

"We're moving along trying to find way to get this done," he said. "That's still our plan, and that's what everyone should focus on."

Contact Lisa Roberson at 329-7121 or lroberson@chroniclet.com.

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 Filed by [Lisa Roberson](#) July 4th, 2009 in [BREAKING](#), [Top Stories](#).

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One Response to "A YEAR LATER: Site owner says work will begin later this month"

-  1. [Eatown](#) says:
[July 6, 2009 at 8:31 am](#)

i heard from a friend that lives in elyria; that the owner has been mostly blowing hot air so he can postpone any action on his part and that he had suggested the city keep the land but let him take the scrap metals from the sight, so he gets away with money from selling the scrap but no responsibility for the bad conditions of the building itself and no responsibility for actually cleaning up the mess.

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